Interview with Roger C. Brewin

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

ROGER C. BREWIN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Can you give us an idea of your background to start with?

BREWIN: I was raised in Columbus, Ohio and went to public schools there. I graduated from high school in 1943, went to Miami (Ohio) University for a half a year and then into the Army for a couple of years, then back to Miami University from which I graduated in 1948. Then I went on to the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) of John Hopkins University, graduating in 1950. I entered the Foreign Service in 1951 after passing the entrance examination and stayed in the Foreign Service for 30 years.

Q: What interested you first in foreign affairs?

BREWIN: My first interest really was my desire to do graduate work. I was a history major at Miami. Professor Howard White of the Political Science Department suggested graduate work in foreign affairs and specifically at SAIS, which had only at that time been in existence for three years. So I went to SAIS in the Spring of 1948 for an interview, was accepted and had no regrets since then. I suppose the interest in foreign affairs really came in my senior year at Miami University. It was a time of considerable activity in Europe—the Marshall Plan was just starting, Marshall had made his famous speech at Harvard in 1947. So foreign affairs seemed to be the most conspicuous activity on

the horizon during my senior year. I considered law school—as a matter of fact, I was accepted by Cornell. But foreign affairs got the nod.

Q: You entered the Foreign Service in 1951. What were your entering class like?

BREWIN: I came with a group of about twenty-one. It was a fairly representative group. There was not a preponderance of “Ivy League” alumni. They came from every major region of the United States; many had graduate degrees as I did; there was one lawyer in the group; there were two who entered through the examination route, but had already been in the State Department in a junior capacity in Intelligence and Research. I would describe them as a basically representative group for the times, although they were all males. One woman joined the class later. All were white.

Q: Did you have adequate training?

BREWIN: The language training was very inadequate. The basic officer course was twelve weeks, at the end of which you got one or two weeks of training in the language of the country to which one had been assigned. I was destined for Zurich. The only German language training I was given was a couple of weeks to build upon the semester of German I had had eight years earlier. It was almost nothing. So I left for Zurich in April 1951 without any command of the language.

Q: What were your responsibilities in Zurich while you were there from 1951-1853.

BREWIN: I began in the Consular Section issuing immigration visas and then spent six months in “notarials and invoices”, then a year in passport work. But that time, two and half years had passed and I was transferred directly to Bombay.

Q: What were our interests in Switzerland at the time?

BREWIN: Not many. Bern, the capital where the legation was, was a very quiet place and I suspect it still is. It had a one officer Political Section; the Economic Section had some

responsibilities on East-West trade—transhipment of sensitive commodities to the Soviet block. Switzerland was involved in that trade. Beyond that, it was just traditional diplomacy.

Q: Then you were in Bombay from 1953 to 1956. That must have been quite a jump from Zurich. How did you find matters in Bombay?

BREWIN: The post had been just been devastated by a 1953 reduction-in-force (RIF) which abolished three or four officer positions. Bombay, like the other two Consulates General in India, was a fairly large post even after the RIF. It had its own traditional political reporting, not too closely superintendent by the Embassy; it had a Consular Section; two or three economic officers. This was a point in India's history when the issue of linguistic states were erupting and when the state of Bombay in the political sense was very much in doubt. It was uncertain of what state Bombay would be the capital. There were fairly extensive riots, quite extensive and violent. People were killed solely because of the language they spoke. Finally, in Bombay State there was a Chief Minister, Morarji Desai, who a couple of decades later—although unforeseen in the 1950s—was to become Prime Minister. He ran the State with an iron fist, had varying interests, including foreign affairs strangely enough. Bombay was an interesting place. During the two and half years I was there I started in consular work and ended in the Economic Section.

Q: What were our economic interests in Bombay?

BREWIN: A major function of the Section was its liaison with the large American community. It was not as large as the British community, but it was large enough. There were two large American oil companies, which have since then been nationalized. The secondary function was economic reporting. We had four very good Indian employees who did the bulk of the economic and commercial reporting. They had been at the post for a number of years. India at the time was poised to decide the future course of economic development—a route of substantial laissez faire in the private sector or a route involving substantial central economic planning with allocation of resources by the center. This

debate which occurred primarily in Delhi nevertheless had its repercussions both in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras.

Q: Did you have any problems dealing with the Indian officials?

BREWIN: Not really. There were one or two celebrated protection cases in which we felt that the government was being too arbitrary and extreme on blameless American citizens. Both cases involved the ugly issue of race and color. There was an American magician who had a show in Bombay. I had seen it a night or two before the incident. I had been called to the stage and asked to cooperate with the magician in the deception. I did what he said. It was perfectly plain to me that the lady was not being sawed in half. Two days later, one of the Indian in the audience was called up by the magician. He refused to cooperate in the deception. He insisted that he and the audience were being deceived. A shouting match occurred between the Indian and the American entertainer. The magician was upset that the Indian was ruining his act. In the end, assault charges were filed by the Indian. The Consulate's position was as long as the case was being pursued in the Indian courts, the American should have his day. We didn't think that there were any foundation for the assault charges and thought that the whole thing should be forgotten. The Chief Minister told the Consul General that he didn't care whether the case would come before the Indian courts or not. He thought that the days when the white man could push the Indian were long gone. He was going to order the magician deported from India forthwith. That would be the end of the case, regardless what the courts might say in the future. The C.G., William Turner, felt compelled to write up the whole thing as a biographic sketch on Chief Minister Desai and observed at the end of his piece that if Desai were ever to go to Delhi as a minister or Prime Minister, the United States might well have some problem with him. He did become Prime Minister years later and we had fewer problems with Desai then we had with Indira Gandhi or Nehru.

Q: Did you have any feeling about the relationship between this rather large Consulate General and our Embassy inNew Delhi?

BREWIN: Basically, I think they were good. Turner and his predecessors felt that they had as much latitude as they needed to call things as they saw them in Bombay, both in economic and political terms. There were some tasks that naturally the Embassy had to pursue for us—e.g. the expulsion of General Motors. This was a matter on which the Embassy could speak for the United States in the halls of the Indian Ministry of Commerce. But in general, we had enough room to call the situations as we saw them. We were certainly not interfered with in the pursuit of trade promotion opportunities or in political developments in the area.

Q: Did you see any effects of the McCarthy period?

BREWIN: Not particularly in Zurich. There were two or three passport cases—American citizens whom the Department had deemed should not be living abroad because of their political opinions. One of these was a China scholar and although the post was never explicitly told why he should return—we had to amend his passport to limit its use only to return to the US—it was presumed that he had friendly view of the Chinese communists. He objected and stayed in India not withstanding the limitation. Another passport case concerned a naturalized American of German origin. It was quite clear from the messages we received that he was a suspected member of subversive organizations and having engaged in subversive activities. The third case was about a woman who although not politically tainted as a Court might see it, had been subject of a number of messages from security officers in the Embassy concerning her conduct especially vis-a-vis Indian males. she was given a passport valid only for return to the United States. She pursued her case to the Supreme Court and won. This was a period in which the Department lost a whole series of cases in the area of passport issuance discretionary authority. We had a couple of days in the Times of India.

Q: I assume that India, being somewhat neutral, left of center period at that time, was a natural attraction which meant that you probably had more of these kinds of cases.

BREWIN: That may well be. In the case of the naturalized American citizen of German origin who was a scientist and was employed by the Indian Atomic Energy Commission, became so angry that he stomped into my office one day to renounce his American citizenship and did. It was an unfortunate case because I can't imagine in retrospect that he could have been a real threat in any sense.

Q: You returned to Washington in 1956 and were assigned to the Department of Commerce. What were your impressions of that Department in the mid-50s? There have always been some tension between State and Commerce.

BREWIN: My own experience was positive. The head of the Far East Division to which I was assigned was Gene Braderman who later entered the Foreign Service and went on to be Consul General in Rotterdam. Gene had a fondness for bringing in Foreign Service officers on rotation into his division. There were two divisions which had FSOs assigned when I was there: the Latin America Division and the Far East one. Gene was a very able division director whom I met for the first time at an Economic Commission for Asia and Far East (ECAFE) conference in Bangalore while I was assigned to Bombay. Gene was on the US delegation. He asked me at the time whether I would be interested in a tour in Commerce. I replied affirmatively. So he put in a bid for my services and I was thereafter assigned to Commerce. Vis-a-vis State, we had good relationships with the Office of South Asian Affairs—we attended their weekly staff meetings, knew all the officers in the Office. There was a certain mutuality of interests in the sense of promoting the idea of American investment in India; in viewing India as a counter-weight to China and as a model of democratic development, notwithstanding the problems we had with the Indians on the issue of too much state intervention in the economy to the detriment of American business interests as we saw it. So between State and Commerce, there was a happy coincidence of interests on the economic front. Q: Then you were assigned to INR from 1959 to 1960. What were your main concerns?

BREWIN: My only concern was to write one chapter of the National Intelligence Survey (NIS), now defunct, on the manufacturing industry. The position I was in was funded by CIA, which no doubt caused me to be put into that famous directory of American intelligence officers published by the East Germans. So that was my main assignment in INR. I did some spot reports from time to time. But mainly it was the chapter on India, worked with the editors to shape it. I stayed about a year and four months, which was quite enough.

Q: Then you were sent to La Paz, Bolivia after a nine month economic training at Stanford University (1960-1961). How was that training program?

BREWIN: It was excellent. It was a very interesting time. The economic faculty at Stanford had two Marxist economists on the faculty, perhaps two of a bare handful in the whole of the country at that time. I took courses from both of them. The campus was excited by Kennedy's election. The Cuban issue was active. The Bay of Pigs convulsed the campus. It was a very interesting nine months.

Q: An experience like that not only improves your academic skills, but also gives you a feel for an American campus which is not often available to Foreign Service officers. A campus can be an important influence on our policies as it did in Vietnam.

BREWIN: Stanford was a very vibrant campus at that time and is still today.

Q: What was the situation in Bolivia when you went there in 1961?

BREWIN: Bolivia was then and may still be somewhat of a “basket” case in terms of economic and social development. The tin mines, its basic industry, were extremely high cost producers unlike Malaysia and other places. It was literately true that they lost money on every pound of tin they produced. They earned dollars, but lost in the profit and loss sense. The State owned mines were a heavily deficit enterprise. The central government's deficit was enormous; they had no way of getting a handle on the situation.

Most agriculture was at the subsistence level. I recall that Tony Solomon, later Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs in State and later Deputy Secretary of Treasury came down on a special mission, after I had arrived. Solomon was very bright and very perspicacious observer. He said that the economy was not viable. He thought that the large sums of money we were putting into Bolivia under the “Alliance for Progress” program were doing little good. President Kennedy had called it the “star in the Alliance's crown”. Solomon saw that the program had to be redirected. State-owned enterprises without exception were losing money hand over fist. Agrarian reform had not accomplished much of anything in economic terms. The State-owned oil enterprise was inefficient and over-staffed. All of these reasons prevented the assistance program from succeeding. A few years after that, Bolivia had the good fortunate to discover oil in the eastern part of the country—Gulf oil uncovered the deposits. Then things looked up for a while. This was after I left the first time.

It was a good assignment for a junior officer. La Paz was a fun place to be; there were interesting assignments in the economic section in terms of assistance to American business. We had an expropriation case involving American citizens. We kept busy.

Q: What does the American Embassy do in an expropriation case?

BREWIN: What happened was that an American citizen had a very large spread in Santa Cruz, which abutted on the Okinawan and the Japanese colonies which had been brought to Bolivia in the 1940s. Months after we first talked to him about the fact that Okinawans were squatting on his turf, I discovered in the Ministry of Campesino Affairs that indeed a certain portion of his property had been expropriated. The head of the Okinawan colony had gone in and denounced the property owned by this American as being in excess of what was allowed under 1952 Agrarian Reform Act, passed after the Revolution of that year. So legally, the Okinawans had a case. There then followed months and literally years of trying to gain some sort of settlement of this case. It was not certain whether the American really wanted his land back. He never could precisely come up with a figure

of what he thought it was worth. For the record, the Bolivians said that he as entitled to compensation, but that they didn't have the money and didn't know how much it was worth and they had to have time to think about it. So when I left, the case was unsolved; when I returned as DCM ten years later; it was still unsolved. The American involved was not particularly pressing his case. I don't think he was given other acreage by the Bolivian government in compensation for what was taken from him. For the Okinawans, that was just a suggestion made at one point by the government. As far as I know, it was never settled.

Q: Tells about the Bolivian miners. They are always held responsible for outbreaks of violence and political instability.

BREWIN: It is not well known that perhaps our first hostage event in the Foreign Service occurred in Bolivia during my last month there—December, 1963. Doug Henderson had been at post one month as Ambassador, when we had a hostage crisis for about ten days. What had happened was that a delegation of American officials—I could have been one of them, except that I couldn't go at that particular time—,consisting of a Peace Corps volunteer, a USIA information officer, an AID officer went to the major Indian Bolivian mine —"The 20th Century", or siglo XX—to make a presentation of some school materials to a group. In the course of their one day there, early in the day, they were seized by left-wing Bolivian tin miners and held captive. There were no concrete demands put forth by the miners; it was just an act of opposition to "North American Imperialism"—things they thought we were doing against the interests of the miners. It was a rather dangerous situation. The three of them plus a Dutch citizen who was the manager of one of the government-owned tin mines were held in a house which sat on a huge cache of dynamite which could have gone off at any time had the miners so wished. The miners who took the officials behaved in not too bad a fashion, given the circumstances. The hostages were not physically abused. The house-wives, "amas de casa", were much more virulent and frequently called for their death. In the end, after protracted negotiations with the miners and the government—President Johnson who had been in office only one month

himself became directly involved—, Ambassador Henderson went to the site and took charge of the negotiations. Henderson had been personally involved in the proceedings. Johnson had made eminently clear to the Ambassador that we were holding the Bolivian government fully responsible for this hostage situation. Furthermore, he said that he did not expect that the Americans would be harmed in any way. How they were to be gotten out was a Bolivian government problem. Of course, we were suggesting all kinds of avenues for the Bolivian government to follow to get our people loose from the miners. In the end, the miners union—associated with the left wing of the MNR Party—led by a man by the name of Juan Lechin, was able to prevail on the hostage takers to let the Americans go and then they were freed.

Q: Did you feel under personal threat while in Bolivia?

BREWIN: To a mild degree. Bolivia can be a violent place. Elements of the population became armed as result of the 1952 revolution. There were lots of guns around; there were many people who were unhappy with the government for one reason or another, but I can't say that any real threshold was crossed in terms of fears. There may have been an occasional sense of uneasiness, but nothing remotely approaching Beirut.

Q: To return to the mission that looked at the Alliance for Progress and said it was all wrong, what was happening in Bolivia at the time you were there?

BREWIN: The Kennedy administration and particularly Theodore Moscoso, the first chief of the Alliance for Progress, were seeking self-sustaining economic growth which meant profitability for the tin mines—not a viable idea, as we came to realize—, some economic growth in the Eastern province to a point at which our budgetary support—the dole—to Bolivia which went on from 1953, the year after the revolution, could be reduced and genuine investment in the infrastructure could be initiated. That was basically was what it was all about for the two years I was there. We never really succeeded in dealing with the problem because there were some very intractable political problems that the central

government faced. One was the tin miners, who opposed violently any reduction in their numbers; another was the centralized bureaucracy which objected to a reduction in government employment; the third was the state enterprises which were all intractable in terms of responding to what was sound managerial advice. It was a difficult proposition for both the Ambassador and the AID mission director and many others who were involved with the Alliance.

Q: Ben Stephansky was the Ambassador. How did he operate?

BREWIN: Ben Stephansky operated pretty much on his own. I mean that he was a champion of the Alliance in Bolivia, was inclined to see less fault with the Bolivian government than many of his staff, was of a liberal Democratic persuasion—had been formerly the labor attach# in Mexico and elsewhere—, and he was sent by the Administration to “make the dream come true”. There was a feeling that Bolivia should be the “shining jewel” in the crown of the Alliance for Progress. He was not much taken with internal criticism of the government unless he himself pointed the finger in that direction. I am not suggesting for a moment that Ben was thoroughly naive about the faults of the government or that he did not realize that there were elements within the government who were certainly inimical to our interests nor did not understand that the government's own internal political control apparatus was quite capable of committing human rights violations. It is nevertheless fair to say he perhaps was not as realistic about the regime at various times as was his staff.

Q: Did you have a feeling that there were constraints on the economic section's reporting?

BREWIN: There may have been a disposition to emphasize what little there was that was constructive—what seemed to represent progress—and perhaps avoiding over-kill on the negative side. Stephansky felt that Washington already knew how bad things were in Bolivia and didn't want to sink the Alliance until the government had had a fair chance. The Alliance was only two years old when I arrived in La Paz and we all understood that years

and years would be required before the economy could be turned around. Constraints perhaps, not so much at my level, but for the AID senior people, who may have felt them more directly than the Economic Section of the Embassy because they were handling the money after all.

Q: Was the drug trade much of a factor?

BREWIN: No, almost zero.

Q: What were American interests in Bolivian during your first tour?

BREWIN: Our main interests were political. The major one was that the center and center-left elements of the ruling MNR party continue in power and that the left wing of the party be kept out of power by all means, fair or foul. Furthermore, it was our view that Victor Paz, who was the Chief of State then and is the President of Bolivia now, represented real hope. The Administration recognized that; Paz was the last Chief of State to visit Kennedy before the latter's assassination. So we put a lot of faith in Paz. Secondly, our interests were in economic development and specifically that the nationalized tin mines be turned around in some fashion and that this dreadful losing proposition must somehow be made viable. There were all sorts of arguments on how this could be accomplished; for example a massive lay-off of the miners—that was deemed impossible because of the danger of large scale violence and because it might give the left wing the opportunity to take over the country.

Q: That is very interesting because some of our academics, particularly earlier in our history in Latin America, thought that our only interest were essentially to further US economic advantages through the development of extractive economic policies—taking things out. In Bolivia's case, apparently there wasn't that much to take out and we were just trying to keep it afloat.

BREWIN: That is right. There were some opportunities in the extracting industries. There were some American companies operating lead, zinc and antimony mines. They became more involved during the military government which ruled during my second tour in Bolivia than they were in the early 1960s.

Q: But you didn't feel that these were driving influences as far as US policies were concerned?

BREWIN: No. There was one private interest which was not American. It was British. These were the Bolivian railroads which were substantially owned by British interests. We were involved in subsidizing the railroads. Like everything else at the governmental level, there were conflicts between the owners and ourselves—principally Ambassador Stephansky— about what should be done about the railroads. The British owners felt that a very hard line was required in respect to the railroad union and government interference in the management of the railroads, with respect to modernization and several other matters. Stephansky was taking the view that the British should not be too hard on the Bolivian government just then. He pointed out that the government had all these other problems and hoped that the issues could be resolved. Basically, the British owners felt that the railroads ought not to get vast amounts of American cash to rehabilitate what was essentially a losing enterprise. They felt that the Bolivian government and the left wing unions were essentially to blame for the situation.

Q: In 1964, you returned to the Bolivian desk in Washington. Did that change your perspective?

BREWIN: Certainly. In the Embassy, under Stephansky's view point and hopes and aspirations for the country, many of us came to have a hopeful, quasi-benign attitude toward Bolivia. When I came back to Washington, both on the State and AID side of the combined ARA-LA Bureau, it struck me that people, particularly at high levels, thought that Bolivia was a hopeless case about which nothing could be done. I was quite struck

with this negative and deep-seated Washington attitude. It was not always reflected in the Washington cables to the field. I was responsible for the back-stopping of the Ambassador in his various disputes particularly about levels of economic assistance. I was back on the desk for only a few months when a military coup essentially, led by the vice-president, took place in Bolivia. Paz was over-thrown; he had to stay out of the country for seven years before he could return. This was a terrible shock to the Embassy, particularly to Doug Henderson who had become quite close to Paz and had hopes of turning him around eventually. Suddenly, a coup came along which caught everybody by surprise.

Q: Was that the beginning of a revolving kind of government? It seemed that they had a coup every other year.

BREWIN: I don't think so. That happened later. Ren# Barrientos, the Vice-president while I was there, an Air Force General, was a very charismatic figure which Paz was not. If he ever had charisma, he lost it. Barrientos was a very colorful person; he could speak one of the two main Indian languages. He had a touch with the Campesinos that no one else ever had. After the initial shock of the over-throw of Paz wore off, who in the year before had been welcomed at the White House, the Presidential duties were assumed by a general. Barrientos was killed three years later in a helicopter accident. Then the revolving door practice started with a series of military governments followed by an election, followed by a coup and so on. Had Barrientos lived, I don't think the political instability which characterized the early '70s in Bolivia would have ensued or occurred in the same depth that we witnessed.

Q: So we had a completely unexpected coup in November 1964. How did we respond?

BREWIN: We responded by recognizing that Paz was finished. He had taken refuge in Lima and he would stay there for seven years. This was a brief period in which we were making a conscious effort to resume relations, under certain circumstances. We examined the government that was being formed, looking particularly for communist sympathizers.

We looked at Barrientos in terms of his capacity to keep the predecessor government's commitments. After about a period of seven or eight days, we declared ourselves prepared to continue relations with Bolivia, which is the terminology we used at that time when confronted with coup situations.

Q: Was there thought about not recognizing the new regime at all?

BREWIN: No, there wasn't. There was some thought by Tom Mann, the then Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs and coordinator for the Alliance for Progress and Special Assistant to the President—he had three titles—to let the non-recognition situation continue until we found more about one or two people in the government. They were thought to have communist antecedents. Indeed, one of them became a considerable thorn in our side years later. Barrientos was chummy with him; they had a personal friendship; he said we were mistaken about his friend's communist origins and he was completely trustworthy. So we finally got over that hurdle and recognized the Barrientos government.

Q: Were there any other noteworthy events during your period as Bolivia desk officer.

BREWIN: No, I think that was the major development. We then began constructing a relationship with Barrientos of the kind we thought we had with Paz.

Q: Did you feel a diminution in interest in the Alliance for Progress during your period on the desk?

BREWIN: No, I didn't. That came later at mid-term during Nixon's first term.

Q: Then you went to Personnel from 1966 to 1968. ARA had the reputation of being in-bred. Did you have that feeling? Did you have any problems getting people into the region and out of it?

BREWIN: There was that feeling. I perceived it to a degree while I was in Personnel. It seemed to me that some officers stayed too long for their own good and that of the Service. There were others who were not in the region who should have been brought in even if that required the sixteen weeks of Spanish or Portuguese language training. We were fortuitous from time to time in getting some very capable officers who wanted to leave the European circuit or the East Asia circuit. The assistance programs that were carrying out in Latin American were attractive to many who wanted to serve in an under-developed country and get a little change of scenery. Dean Hinton, for example, came into ARA for that reason.

Q: Then you were assigned to Paraguay as Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) from 1969 to 1972. How did this assignment come about?

BREWIN: I was in the War College from 1968 to 1969. The Paraguay job was to be vacated in the summer of 1969. I was very interested in becoming a DCM, so I had my name put forward. I had done well in the Personnel job. The then Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration, Findley Burns, who was to succeed Rodger Abraham, had a good opinion of me. So when I expressed my interest, he said it was fine with him. He knew the Ambassador, who was also going to be new. So Burns talked to him and got his approval.

Q: What was the situation in Paraguay between 1969 and 1972?

BREWIN: It was the same situation that had been in existence for many years and was to continue until last year when Stroessner finally left. Stroessner had come to power in 1954. He controlled the country. It was said that a sparrow could not drop from a tree without Stroessner knowing about it, which was probably not much of an exaggeration. We had an AID program, which was not that small despite the size of the country. There were about nine officers in the US military group basically providing training, but there was also some military equipment assistance. So all elements of a country team were

present even though on a small scale. As far as any of us could see, Stroessner was the power in the government and that that would continue for the foreseeable future, although there was wide-spread electoral abuse in terms of ballot counting. No one believed that Stroessner could lose even an honest election. There were some storm signals, however, quite evident. The Catholic Church had had a conference in Medellin, Columbia earlier in 1969 during which some strong statements were made about the need for the Church to become closer to the people, to become more vocal for the need for greater social justice and greater compassion for the under-privileged. The documents issued during this conference were taken very seriously by several bishops in power, one of whom was an American. It is fair to say that from 1968-69, a division opened up between the Church and Stroessner in what was otherwise a happy relationship. The events in the '70s and early '80s culminated in Stroessner's over-throw could be perhaps traced to the period we are discussing. In fact, General Rodriguez, who over-threw Stroessner and kicked him out of the country, had been implicated in a coup not long before I got there in 1969. Stroessner, rather than treating Rodriguez roughly, just remonstrated with him, exiled him for a time and told him not to ever do that again. That was obviously a mistake.

Q: What were American interests in Paraguay in the early '70s?

BREWIN: One interest which came to the fore was the drug interest. We had an interesting case. The Embassy became for all purposes a “one issue” Embassy. We tried to get our hands on one man—August Ricord, a Frenchman—whom we thought initially was being protected by the government. This became a real problem for the Ambassador in terms of his relations with Washington and for the Ambassador in terms of his relations with his staff. It was a difficult time. We got our man after sixteen months of badgering the Paraguayans. He was given a thirty year sentence by a court in Miami, of which he served about seven and then returned to Paraguay. It was a difficult period.

Q: The Ambassador during this period was J. Raymond Ylitalo. What were his problems with Washington and his staff?

BREWIN: The problem with Washington was trying to convince it that he was being as vigorous as it thought he should be in getting the suspect turned over to the United States. Washington's view was that Stroessner ran the country and therefore he could give us the man we wanted. The issues of due process and the Paraguayan courts and the extradition process that the Paraguayans kept raising were not credible, in Washington's eyes. Eventually Washington had to acquiesce and had to let the Paraguayan court system do its will. But Washington frankly felt that Ylitalo was not being zealous enough in pursuing this interest. Washington was absolutely stunned as we were at the post when the court found in the first instance in favor of Ricord. It found that the extradition treaty between The United States and Paraguay didn't apply to drug offenses. This was impossible for Washington to believe that such a decision could have been made without it first being cleared with Stroessner. We finally got over that hurdle and eventually we got our man, but not before we had to break some crockery.

As for staff, there were many who didn't think that the Ambassador was aggressive enough initially. There was a time in the first few days when the interests of US law enforcement first became known to us when two people came to Asuncion. They didn't want to use the extradition process because it would have been too time consuming. They had their plane and just wanted to take him out of the country. At that point, people thought that we should be able to lay hands on the man. My view, which was opposite of the Ambassador's, was that it had to be made apparent early on in the process that this was just not any extradition case; that there was a political dimension to it; that it was a political issue between the two governments; and that the people around Stroessner—there were certain pipelines to him used for differing purposes—must be given the message that we were serious about this issue. Eventually, that view prevailed because a higher court decided that the suspect was extraditable. Most of us believed that a purely traditional decision—in the sense that we would understand that the judicial operated independently from the executive in Paraguay—was a laughable notion. Most of us believed that only a political dimension would succeed in convincing the Paraguayans to surrender the

suspect. I am not so sure that the Ambassador seized that understanding in quite the way he should have in the first few months of the case. To the Paraguayans credit, though, they did jail Ricord, without bond, and kept him until the case was finally resolved in the courts.

Q: How did the CIA operate in this situation?

BREWIN: The station in Asuncion was small. It had its own interests and it was perfectly prepared to be helpful as much as it could. But this issue really revolved around the Embassy making its view known to President Stroessner. The station couldn't do much beyond that. So it could not really help or hinder.

Q: How about AID?

BREWIN: AID was useful in terms of getting our view of the issue to the various Ministries it dealt with. All the Ministers were of course Stroessner appointees. Some were generals who were friends of Stroessner since their junior officer days. AID was useful in that way. The assistance program was fairly large for a country the size of Paraguay. We had programs in agriculture, education, small manufacturing, but mostly agriculture and education.

Q: Did you have any problem justifying an assistance program to a dictator?

BREWIN: That was not a major problem. We realized that there were “red light” and green light” countries on the human rights cum political democracy front. Two favorite countries would have been Columbia and Costa Rica while Cuban would obviously be an unfavored one. We tended to believe that Paraguay was in an “amber caution light” zone. There was just so far that Stroessner could go before jeopardizing assistance levels, particularly military aid. He seemed to sense that as well to a degree. We talked frequently to the political opposition and didn't hide that fact; we talked to some dissident Church people from time to time as needed and the government knew that was happening and didn't

express any particular objection. It was certainly away from the posture that the Reagan administration took in its last years under Assistant Secretary Abrams. I was stunned in respect of how wise and needed was the opening of society to democratic dissent.

Q: You left Paraguay in 1972 and went to La Paz as Deputy Chief of Mission. Were you beginning to feel a little land-locked?

BREWIN: I was. But I was attracted by the prospect of working for Ambassador Siracusa, then our Ambassador to Bolivia. I had known him, although not well, since the '60s. I had some familiarity with Bolivia, having served there previously. That may have given me a leg up on the job. In going there, I was not surprised to find that not too much had changed after all the years. The same unfinished office buildings were there; the same problems were at hand; it was just as expensive to mine a pound of tin as it had always been. There had been one salutary development, however, which may have kept the country together—to the extent it was kept together at all—, had been the discovery of oil in the Eastern Provinces. That was a substantial development which occurred in Santa Cruz as a consequence of an oil strike. Gulf found the oil; it was nationalized in 1970 by the Bolivians much to everyone's distress.

The years 1972-74 saw the beginning of the drug issue as a major problem for the United States. Unlike the Paraguayan experience, where it took sixteen months to get a well known heroin trafficker before our courts, in Bolivia it was always fairly easy to get the malefactors transferred to our custody in the middle of the night at the airport. They were cooperative in the law-enforcement sense. It became difficult for the Bolivians to respond some time later. When it came to the matter of growing the coca leaf, which was the sole support for many Campesinos, this was much more difficult and we still have that problem today. I don't know where the answer will be found.

Q: You worked for two Ambassadors: Siracusa and Bill Stedman. What was the difference in their methods of operations?

BREWIN: Only to the extent that Siracusa had been there for four years when I arrived. It is best to describe his approach as relaxed. The mission was running smoothly by and large. People knew what their jobs were and did them well. I would say that there was no real significant differences between the two men in their styles. Both were quite “hands-on” when the need arose which it did from time to time. I enjoyed working with both; I think I learned something from each of them.

Q: Were there any other developments besides the growth of the drug business and the finding of oil while you were there?

BREWIN: We were looking to see what would happen after President Banzer. He had been a general who has seized power from Torres who was almost a “nightmare come true”—a crypto-communist chief of state. Banzer's military coup threw out Torres. Banzer was a center-right person who governed in a quasi-martial law environment. He was favorable toward the United States. He had aspirations to become a civilian, elected President; we encouraged him along this path.

Q: Were you there when Torres was in?

BREWIN: No. Banzer overthrew Torres in late '71 or early '72. Torres had been a very difficult problem for the Embassy and for Siracusa in particular because Torres seemed to make real the fears we had in the early ''60s about Juan Lechin, the chief of the tin mines, coming to power. That seemed to have happened when Torres came to power. The government had been penetrated at various levels by communists; the Peace Corps was harassed by the government as agents for American imperialism. It was a very difficult period. Banzer was like a breath of fresh air for us. Siracusa and I and others regarded him as the last hope for Bolivia in terms of political stability.

Q: Then you were sent to Tehran as Economic Counselor. How did you manage to get this assignment, after Asuncion and La Paz?

BREWIN: I was called by Personnel while in Bolivia as my tour was coming to an end and was asked whether I wanted to go to Iran. I asked whether I could get back the following day. They said ok, but no later than that. I discussed it with my wife who was ecstatic about the idea of going back to the Middle East, where she had served before we were married. So I agreed.

Q: You were there from 1974 to 1978, which was a very interesting period. Can you describe the situation in 1974 when you arrived in Tehran.

BREWIN: When I got there, the recycling of the petrodollar had begun with a real vengeance. The oil price increases of the early "70s were just beginning to bring in the bountiful receipts. The country was knee-deep in Western businessmen looking for a piece of the action. It seemed to herald an era of $22 billion of expenditures per year, every year as far as one could foresee in the future. There might have been ups and downs in the revenues and problems here and there—including problems of absorbing all the imports—but it seemed like good times would never stop.

Q: We were encouraging the Iranians to spend considerable amounts on military end items, particularly American first line equipment. How did you and the Embassy feel about this policy?

BREWIN: The Embassy's point of view was that what the Shah asked for, he got, with very few exceptions—some very high tech items which in some cases hadn't even been released to US forces. The “Nixon doctrine” governed. We viewed the Shah as the keeper of peace in the Gulf area. He was the bulwark of stability in the area. If he wanted to buy stuff from us, that was fine; we were happy to sell it.

Q: That was our policy. How was it viewed internally in the Embassy? Was there concern?

BREWIN: There were occasional manifestations of concern, but they never really percolated up to the Ambassador or in field reports. The concerns that we received

were from the Congress about why a certain weapon system was being sold and why it had to be so sophisticated (e.g. the Airborne Warning System (AWACS)). The role of the Embassy and particularly the Ambassador was to interpret the role of Iran to the Congressmen. He had to point out the Shah's real needs.

Q: Did you have trouble with Congress? We had a policy which was being challenged outside the Administration. Did for example the economic section question whether Iran should be spending these huge amounts on military hardware when there were developmental needs elsewhere?

BREWIN: No; that was never a problem for my section. One of the givens in the economic section that we had to work with was that there would be significant amounts spent for military hardware and whether we rationalized it to ourselves or were looking for a pretext, I don't know, but we said—and DoD said this—there would spin-offs from these weapon purchases in turn of economic development—for example, co-production. We thought that eventually aircraft would be manufactured in Iran. Motor vehicles would be built in Iran in greater numbers. These were all spin-offs from weapon sales. I don't think our policy caused my section any great problems. We were kept busy enough with the purely commercial, non-military business.

Q: Were there concerns about the vast influx of Americans that came along with the weapon sales?

BREWIN: Not really serious ones while I was there. Bell helicopter, primarily based in Isfahan, had a reputation, not really deserved, for having a bunch of rowdies—Americans perfectly capable of driving a motorcycle through a mosque half naked or giving offense to the Iranians in a variety of ways. Most of these stories were apocryphal. Most Americans were put on their good behavior by their employers back in the US and most were aware that Iran was a different place by far from any place they had ever been, including the Arab world. They knew that there were sensitivities. There were exceptions from time to time,

but the potential problem which some of us foresaw was the issue of Americans being held hostage in a time when the Shah might become less secure on his throne. What would we do with thirty two thousand Americans if the Shah were to go down the tube?

Q: So there was concern that the Shah might not be there forever?

BREWIN: Yes. The concern was not that one could foresee the Shah's overthrow in a coup d'etat, but when after many years he would pass from the scene by death or some incapacity. Could then the new Shah tame what might be pressures on the society? Then what happens to the Americans if there were riots in the streets or disturbances of the kind that occurred under Mossadegh?

Q: So we looked back to the Mossadegh period as a potential model for the future?

BREWIN: Yes; something to be avoided at all costs.

Q: So the large American civilian presence was a major concern?

BREWIN: It was a major concern. I was active in the US-Iran Chamber of Commerce —I was an office-holder for the period I was there—provided monthly forums for the Americans to meet. There were reasonable amounts of social outlets for the Americans —far, far more than there were in Saudi Arabia, for example. There were possibilities of interesting travel within Iran. So I never found the American community to be a difficult one to work with either in the business sense or to live with in the social sense.

Q: How were your dealings with the Iranian officials?

BREWIN: We came to understand more and more as time went on that, as Ambassador Richard Helms put it in one of his telegrams to Kissinger, Iranians had by now wanted to be treated as equal partners when they sat at the table with us. No more crumbs. This was the prevailing official attitude. The Iranians I dealt with were usually charming and very hospitable. When they said “No”, they often found ways to do so in a charming and

friendly manner, but it was quite clear that there was an element of nationalism present in the Iranian make up and in the Shah's government which went from top to bottom. One understood that this was present and could surface, and did, from time to time. For example, we had the US-Iranian Joint Commission—an institution that Kissinger conceived—as a mechanism in the OPEC countries through which the United States could move in basically any technically assistance on a government-to-government level as desired by the host government. There was one in Saudi Arabia and one in Iran and one in India. That never really got going as an idea because the Iranians always seemed to be busy with other things and what was it that this Joint Commission was supposed to accomplish that existing mechanisms could not? It was clear that we saw the Commission as a petro-recycling mechanism—to get the Bureau of Public Roads into Iran, the Census Bureau, the Department of Agriculture. The Iranians said “Fine. We'll be glad to have these people, but we will pick and choose and this Commission is not to be deemed as an United States export promotion device”. That was fair enough.

These were very interesting times. It was a very, very active post and section. The work-load was absolutely horrendous—day in and day out, people were seeking advice of one kind or another. In the early months, it was hard for me to give advice because of the tight control that the government exercised over information distribution. The two English language dailies in Tehran were almost worthless as a depository of any kind of information of interest to me. So we had to go out and dig for it and often that meant doing it on the social circle at night, which then became essentially an extension of the office in terms of information collection. It was probably eighteen months before I felt sufficiently sure of myself in my grasp of what was happening in the country and what was likely to happen. It was only then that I could counsel those who came in as to what they should or shouldn't do in terms of their business activities.

Q: When you looked at the economy of Iran, did you feel that viable investment were being made by the Shah and his government?

BREWIN: He was not investing enough in agriculture. There were two things for which one could criticize the Iranian government without fear of being looked at askance by your Iranian interlocutors. One was the mayor of Tehran, who was fair game because of the condition of the city—congestion and pollution. The other that Iran had turned from a food-surplus to a food-deficit nation in less than a couple of decades. The Shah seemed not to do a lot about that problem. An awful lot of money went into construction of various kinds —office buildings, homes, cultural centers, monuments of one kind or another. All of these gobbled up a great deal of money. Some of it was purely wasted. A great deal of money was spent on the beginning of a petro-chemical complex on the Persian Gulf and three or four nuclear power plants in 1978 and early '79.

Q: Did you feel any constraints in your reporting?

BREWIN: Not in my section. I think the political section was constrained; there is no question about that. They were constrained about reporting on human rights violations, on the opposition to the Shah. I think that constraint was present going back even to 1953 when we put the Shah back on his throne. Some Ambassadors were far more vehement on this subject than others—Douglas MacArthur II, for example, would tolerate no criticism of the Shah in the post's reporting whatsoever.

Q: You served under two hard-charging Ambassadors: Richard Helms, ex CIA chief, and William Sullivan, who had been sort of a "field marshal" in Vietnam. How would you compare them in style and methods?

BREWIN: I am genuinely fond of both Helms and Sullivan. Helms could be a bit remote at times but at the same time was an "open door" Ambassador—you could walk right in and discuss any problems you might have. You didn't have to go through the D.C.M. if you didn't want to. We had daily staff meetings—Ambassador, DCM, station chiefs and the counselors. They only lasted 15-20 minutes which was sufficient to apprise people of what was going on.

Both Helms and Sullivan had good relations with the Shah. Neither one was disposed to speak outside the confines of the front office what the Shah may have said to him unless it bore directly on the work of the section chief. I therefore remember seeing only one or two cable reports of Ambassador-Shah meetings during the time I was there. This was done essentially to make sure that these conversations did not get on the street or the cocktail circuit. That was understandable. It is hard to contrast them. Sullivan perhaps came to take, while I was there, a more direct “hands-on” role with the Political Section reporting because by that time, early 1978 on, it was clear that something was happening in terms of opposition to the Shah. Helms was very interested and active in meeting Iranians. He resisted the idea that he should only have the usual Iranian contacts that the Embassy and previous Ambassadors had cultivated. He struck out in new directions. Sullivan continued that practice to a degree.

Q: You left in August 1978. What was the situation at that point?

BREWIN: Turmoil was clearly present by that time. People have asked me what the first manifestations were that matters were going awry. My own recollection is it started in Tabriz when the mobs sacked a government bank—Bank Melli, meaning “National” in Farsi— leaving broken glass all over the place. Nothing happened and nothing was done to the rioters. Then it seemed to me that something was going wrong. When this misdeed went unpunished, the Shah lost face and command and control. Then he became vulnerable to other acts against the State. These episodes continued throughout 1978 and we now know what happened in the end. However, when I left, the Shah was still in power and I thought that he would continue, but I had no sense how he was going to deal with the situation. It occurred to me that “in extremis”, the military might well clamp down forcefully and that the Shah would be able to survive the situation.

Q: You returned to the Department in 1978 and until 1980 you were the Director of the Agricultural Office in the Bureau for International Organizations. What were your responsibilities there?

BREWIN: We looked after our interests in international organizations dealing with food matters. All these organizations were based in Rome. We had a separate mission there called FODAG, which is now headed by an official of Ambassadorial rank—that wasn't true then. A small staff of Foreign Service and AID officers which represented our interests in FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), Food for Peace, IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) and an umbrella policy body—the World Food Council which met one a year. We made up the delegations for the FAO meetings, coordinated with the Department of Agriculture, dealt with contentious issues in the FAO of which there were a few. It was not the best of times nor the worst of times for US relations with these bodies. It got much worst later particularly in terms of budgets. The then and now Director General of FAO was not the easiest person to deal with; he tended to run the organization as a private fiefdom, which annoyed us. He could be unresponsive occasionally on political issues. The budget was always a problem for us; it seemed to be always too large. Some of the activities undertaken by the Director General seemed to be outright political for the benefit of the Third World, which is where the votes were for his re-election every four years. Edward Saouma is an able water resources technician and able in other ways as well. I suppose he is head of the FAO for as long as he wants to stay. He can be prickly when he wants to be.

Q: Then you were for the Board of Examiners for four months between 1980 and 1981. Then you went to your present assignments. Tell us what that is, please?

BREWIN: The Asylum Office in the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs deals with two elements of the Department of Justice: the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the various immigration judges. We supply, pursuant to an Executive order which was issued in about 1972, advisory opinions on applications for political

asylum made by foreigners living in the United States. That is our role by Executive Order. The role of the Department of Justice, by statute, is to decide in each asylum case whether or not, using our advisory opinions as guidance or not as they see fit—our opinion is non binding—the person has a well founded fear of persecution in his home land for any of five reasons: race, nationality, membership in social group, religion or political opinion. If pursuant to the guidelines laid down by the courts, by various U.N. bodies, various internal federal government guidelines, a person can establish a well-founded fear of persecution to the satisfaction of the INS examiner or the immigration judge, if the case goes that far, the person can be granted asylum, which mean status tantamount to permanent residence in the United States. He then has the right to work legally. A person from a country in the Near East says he can't return to Syria, for example for reasons given in the application, it is my job to examine that, evaluate it and then tell the INS office to which he has applied, my views on his or her assertion.

Q: Just one example that immediately springs to mind as a political potato is Israel with its power over the West Bank with its preponderance of Palestinians. Would a Palestinian be eligible, even given Israel's strong ties with the United States and given its domestic constituency?

BREWIN: Thus far we have seen comparatively few Palestinians who have fled either the West Bank or Gaza since the Intifada—the uprising—broke out in December 1987. What we do see are Palestinians who lived in Lebanon, around the Arabian Peninsula, worked in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates for a number of years—taken in some instances there by their parents—who have gotten a visitor's visa to the United States and then apply for asylum when their resident permit in the United Arab Emirates, for example, has expired. He has no where else to go; he is stateless. There are allegations about persecution by Israel which go way back in time, back to 1947-48 when their parents left Palestine. The circumstances vary from case to case. We have seen only a few cases thus far alleging persecution in the West Bank and Gaza following the outbreak of the intifada. I think we will. I don't think that there is any particular reason for it; it may be that

there are difficulties in getting visas in the first place. A number have entered illegally of course. Many undoubtedly are just staying there just to see what happens.

Q: How about Lebanese?

BREWIN: There is chaos in Lebanon and virtually every Lebanese who gets to the United States—regardless of how—applies for asylum. Generally they do not get it at least in the numbers that one might expect. The reason is for this is that civil war alone does not normally get you asylum from the INS. Generally you have to show that you have been targeted or singled out—I don't like to use those terms because they have certain legal implications with which people are uncomfortable—or that they have been mistreated in more than one area of the country. I think the grant of asylum to Lebanese, according to the INS, is perhaps 15-20% which is a respectable number considering the constraints on INS because of the civil war issue.

End of interview